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ABSTRACT

This study examined issues of educational equity, emphasizing how native Hawaiian women came to be educators, how their experiences as pupils influenced their professional development as teachers, how their commitments developed over time, and how their professional development could be fostered in preservice and inservice settings. The five native Hawaiian participants were all enrolled in a preservice teacher education program at the University of Hawaii. Researchers asked them to report on several factors identified as impacting the progress of students from groups underrepresented in higher education and to describe their perceptions and experiences. The factors included: expectations of academic success; preparation for academic studies; influence of socioeconomic status; support and encouragement from friends, family, and teachers; social/health issues; success in mastering the mainstream culture of the education system, especially English language instruction; experiences with stereotypes and discriminatory practices; presence or absence of role models; experiences with program admission requirements; and ability to assimilate into the university system. Researchers collected the data using life history interviews, personal narratives, and reaction papers. Four of the five women reported several factors that hindered their progress, including low self-expectations of academic success, poor preparation for academic study, discriminatory treatment by some teachers, and problems passing the admission test requirement. Some also had difficulties with family finances and with mastering mainstream English. (Contains 20 references.) (SM)

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STARTING BLOCKS OR STUMBLING BLOCKS TO HIGHER EDUCATION?:

CASE STUDIES OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN WOMEN

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Introduction

"Monoculturalism" is the practice of catering to the dominant or mainstream culture, providing second-class treatment or no special consideration at all to persons of nonmainstream cultures. (Haas, 1992, p. 161)

Haas' (1992) picture of institutional racism in Hawai'i lends strong support to charges that Native Hawaiians experience conditions of injustice and inequity in education, particularly in the arena of higher education. Statistical reports over the years indicate a constancy in the effects of these conditions. Although Hawaiians make up approximately 18% of the State of Hawai'i's general population, along with 24% Caucasian Americans, 20% Japanese Americans, and 11% Filipino Americans, they and Filipino Americans are the most underrepresented groups in higher education. In the distribution of University of Hawai'i at Manoa graduates by ethnicity for the 1995 - 1996 academic year: 24% were Japanese, 22% White, 15% Chinese, 7% Filipino, and 7% Hawaiian (University of Hawai'i Institutional Research Office, 1996a). A similar pattern appeared in the distribution of University of Hawai'i at Manoa tenured and tenurable faculty by ethnicity: 70% were White, 13% Japanese, 10% Chinese/Korean, 2% Hawaiian, and 1% Filipino (University of Hawai'i Institutional Research Office, 1996b). Hawaiian women, in particular, are greatly underrepresented across all levels of higher education, most especially at the graduate and tenured faculty levels.

In response to recent demands for equity in education, research on the nature of ethnic and gender discrimination in higher education reveals several economic, social, and educational cleavages that exist between Hawaiian women and academics of other cultures (Mau, 1993). However, because most studies in this area report aggregate data, few examine the reasons or the subtleties behind these statistical reportings. At present, little is known about the factors that impact the educational experiences of Hawaiian women interested in becoming teachers. This study examines the personal experiences of five Hawaiian women enrolled in the Ka Lama O Ke Kaialu (Ka Lama) Preservice Teacher Education Program at the University of Hawai'i. It focuses on the supports and barriers encountered by Bernice, Iwalani, Moana, Pua'ala, and Sheila throughout their educations and seeks information on how these elements shaped their recruitment to and progress in their pre-service teacher education program.

Because teachers of diverse backgrounds may contribute in significant ways to the academic success of children from similar backgrounds, there is a pressing need, in terms of both theory and practice, for research on the lives and professional development of these teachers. This study contributes to suggestions on how to recruit Hawaiians to the teaching profession, how to prepare them to become teachers, and how to provide culturally-responsive teacher education programs.

Literature Review

The Underrepresentation of Hawaiians in Higher Education

Many of the reasons for the underrepresentation of Hawaiians in higher education can be traced to their earlier experiences in the education system. In terms of student achievement, Caucasian and Japanese American students as groups score considerably higher on standardized tests than Hawaiian and Filipino American students. Typically, Hawaiians as a group score in the bottom quartile on standardized tests of reading and mathematics at the elementary and secondary school levels. Their rates of absenteeism and retention in grade are far above average (Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate, 1993).

One factor contributing to the generally low rates of achievement of Hawaiian children is an

exceptionally high rate of teacher turnover in some schools, especially in areas with large populations of Hawaiian students, such as the Leeward Coast of O'ahu, Hawai'i. Leeward Coast schools, for example, generally experience a 20-33% turnover of teachers in a given year, although the percentage may be even higher for some schools. At one elementary school, 18 new teachers out of a staff of 36 had to be hired for the fall of 1995. A second and related factor contributing to the challenges Hawaiian children face is an absence of role models. For example, an evaluation of selected schools with a high number of Hawaiian children showed the following distribution of teachers by ethnicity: 66% were Japanese, 17% Chinese, 8.5% White, and 8.5% Hawaiian (Tikunoff, Ward, & Van Broekhuizen, 1993). Under these conditions, Hawaiian children have relatively little opportunity to be taught by Hawaiian teachers who can serve as role models.

Instructional approaches that do not build on the strengths students have gained in the home and community is a third factor contributing to the poor school performance of Hawaiian children (Au, 1993; Au & Kawakami, 1994). Culturally responsive instruction is an important consideration because it fosters students' academic learning and self-esteem through teaching strategies and forms of classroom interaction and organization that build on the strengths students bring to school (Au & Kawakami, 1985; Jordan, 1985). Further research examining the beliefs and practices of teachers from Hawaiian and other ethnic backgrounds is needed. In particular, studies examining the academic expectations that teachers hold for Hawaiian children and how these expectations are shaped by teaching practices will yield important information on how to develop classroom programs that are successful in bringing about high levels of academic achievement.

Other factors such as the low soci-economic status of many Hawaiians; social/health concerns (e.g., the overrepresentation of Hawaiians on welfare and in prison, and the poor health record of Hawaiians); the lack of support and encouragement from family members; difficulty mastering the mainstream culture of the education system especially the English language of instruction; and stereotypes that promote insensitivity/biases (e.g., the discriminatory practices of teachers/instructors) also contribute to the lack of school success experienced by Hawaiian students ("Minority Rolls Down at UH," 1993).

The University of Hawai'i has its own well established barriers for students of underrepresented groups. These include culturally biased admission tests used to screen applicants and the "hostile" atmosphere of a large, impersonal campus (e.g., lack of information on programs/admission procedures/advisement). The absence of role models of Hawaiian ethnicity and the absence of culturally appropriate instructional practices are also problems at the University of Hawaii (Haas, 1992; "Minority Rolls Down at UH," 1993). One of the serious outcomes of these conditions is the dearth of professionals of Hawaiian ethnicity with graduate degrees in education to fill roles of administration, personnel preparation, and applied research.

Teachers' life Histories

Teachers life histories and personal narratives can provide important information on how to successfully recruit and prepare teachers from groups underrepresented in education (Goodson, 1992). In a biographical study of five beginning teachers, Knowles (1992) found that the school experiences of his subjects appeared to exert a stronger influence on their professional development than their experiences in their preservice teacher education program. He argued that his subjects' teaching approaches were affected by their role identity as teachers. Knowles identified the major components of teacher role identity as family childhood experiences; teachers who served as role models; previous teaching experiences, including tutoring; and significant people and experiences at the university, particularly university instructors. He highlighted the need to understand how the life experiences of preservice teachers can be utilized within the context of a teacher education program to promote the development of stronger teacher role identities (see also Huberman, 1995).

There are few studies of the life histories of teachers of diverse backgrounds (Henry, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Life history studies may show what motivates individuals of diverse backgrounds to become teachers; to make the commitment to teach in schools in ethnically diverse, low-income communities; and to improve education in these communities. Research on teachers' life histories might also yield important information on how to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented groups.

Method

Qualitative Methodology

This study contributes to a better understanding of issues of educational equity and to the improvement of future preservice teacher education programs. The central research questions are;

- How do Hawaiian women come to be educators?
- How do their own experiences as pupils influence their professional development as teachers?
- How do their commitments develop over the courses of their lives?
- How can their professional development be fostered and sustained, in either preservice or inservice teacher education settings?

The research methodology is in keeping with a constructivist/interpretivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The life history interviews follow procedures for ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) and are being developed in the manner of collaborative biographies, in keeping with procedures for narrative research (Cortazzi, 1993). The preservice teachers' written assignments (personal narratives and reaction papers) were analyzed in light of the questions stated above.

Setting

Ka Lama one of the preservice teacher education cohorts in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i. Established in 1995, the purpose of Ka Lama is to improve the education of Hawaiian students in public schools on the Leeward Coast of the island of O'ahu, by recruiting and training teachers with a commitment to the area. The Leeward Coast has a high rate of poverty. Two-thirds of the students are Hawaiian, as compared with no more than 10% of the teachers. Many teachers do not live in the area, and there is a high rate of teacher turnover. Ka Lama's university courses emphasize the themes of literacy, multicultural education, and Hawaiian culture. Literacy is emphasized because effective reading, writing, and critical thinking are regarded as foundational to children's success in all areas of the curriculum. Multicultural education and Hawaiian culture are emphasized because of the importance of culturally responsive instruction and Hawaiian studies in making connections between the curriculum and children's backgrounds and interests.

Participants

The five participants, who vary in age (ranging from 23 to 44 years) and experiences, are all of Hawaiian ethnicity and are enrolled in the Ka Lama Program. There are 28 student teachers enrolled in the cohort. About two thirds of them are of Hawaiian ethnicity. The others are of Japanese, Samoan, Chinese, Filipino, or European American ethnicity. The group includes only four males, two of whom are of Hawaiian ethnicity.

Design and Procedure

The participants were asked to report on several factors identified as impacting the progress of students from groups underrepresented in higher education and to describe their perceptions and experiences. These

factors are expectations of academic success; preparation for academic studies; the influence of socio-economic status; support and encouragement received from friends, family members, and teachers; social/health issues; success in mastering the mainstream culture of the education system especially the English language of instruction; experiences with stereotypes and discriminatory practices; presence or absence of role models; experiences with program admission requirements; and the ability to assimilate into the university system. Data were collected through life history interviews, personal narratives, and reaction papers.

Findings and Discussion

Although the educational experiences of the five participants cannot be considered representative of all women of Hawaiian ethnicity, the study does identify salient patterns and themes in their experiences, beliefs, and practices. The following examples illustrate the wealth of information that was collected.

Of the five participants, three reported growing up in homes where finances were limited. Bernice explained that she *came from a family of eight children and we lived pay check to pay check. My father deserted us, moved to the mainland and never bothered to send any child support* (personal narrative). Sheila described her socio-economic status as *my main barrier to higher education. I had my first child at the age of 17 and for this reason I could not go out and look for a job, and, to put it bluntly, I was poor* (personal narrative). Moana, who was raised by her grandparents, talked of an upbringing where she rarely lacked anything, especially when it came to her education. She did, however, report that she was *not in the same situation as my brother and sister, who dealt with being on welfare* (personal narrative). When asked to comment on social and health issues, Pua'ala, Iwalani, and Sheila reported histories of good health. Moana reported suffering from a life threatening illness. She also noted that her father, who had spent some time in prison, had a history of alcohol and drug dependency. She acknowledged that *it is well documented that Hawaiians have the worst statistics in the state. We are overrepresented in the prison population, we have terrible health problems, and are underrepresented in arenas of higher learning and upper level jobs* (personal narrative).

When asked about their expectations of academic success, four of the five participants reported that, initially, they held low expectations for themselves, especially at the university level. Bernice felt that her *school work was a second priority. I had to be sure the kids (siblings) took a bath and had to help cook dinner every night. I believed this was all I had to look forward to in my future. This is what I thought life was all about. I never thought of going on to higher education after graduation from high school* (personal narrative). Sheila related similar experiences. She said she *didn't have a mentor in my life at that time. My parents did not encourage me to go to college, nor did I have other family members or teachers to push me in that direction* (personal narrative). Moana, a private school graduate, related experiences to the contrary--*I attended Kamehameha High School and we were all expected to strive for the best. At home, I was expected to do well. My grandfather always talked to me about the importance of education* (personal narrative).

Bernice, Sheila, Pua'ala, and Iwalani felt that their preparation for academic studies at the university level was inadequate. Pua'ala believed that *the curricula developed at each school varies within each district, and whether a student enrolls in a college prep or a vocational course is determined by previous courses. Tracking students into vocational courses will not prepare them for the rigorous academic challenges of college* (personal narrative). Again, Moana related different experiences. She felt she was *well prepared for academic studies. This was due to the fact that my preparation began in the fifth grade. Also, the schools I attended always pushed students to do everything with pride* (personal narrative).

In terms of encouragement to attend university, each of the participants reported varying degrees of

support. Moana, who received strong family support, said *I feel that I was very fortunate. Throughout my years in school, I have always had strong support from my grandfather I always personally valued education and I never let anyone who didn't support my efforts bother me* (life history interview). Iwalani, Pua'ala, and Sheila reported families who were somewhat supportive, but who did not actively encourage them to study at the university level. Although her parents were very supportive of her present studies, Sheila noted that *had my parents encouraged me to go to college when I was younger, I'm almost sure that I would have done so right after graduating from high school. I can't ever recall a time of having sat with them to have serious conversations about my future and going to college* (life history interview). Bernice, who was the only participant to describe an obvious lack of support, said *.... My parents tried, but I think there were just too many of us (children) my stepfather was never one who was a big supporter of higher education. He barely graduated from high school himself It was considered a miracle even if we graduated from high school* (reaction paper).

The College of Education program admission requirements proved problematic for Iwalani, Sheila, Pua'ala, and Bernice. In particular, they had difficulty passing the standardized admission test. On receiving her test results, Pua'ala said that she saw her future as a teacher--*DASHED! I held that piece of paper and sat down for a moment shaking my head. I began to go over the reasons why I didn't pass. From that fateful afternoon that I received my test scores, I was practically inconsolable. I wept the entire afternoon* (personal narrative). Bernice described a similar experience, *...and I didn't pass the test. ... I had quit my job in the travel industry to return to school to become a teacher. I felt very stupid and demoralized* (life history interview). Moana, the only one of the four who performed well on the admission test, noted that her success stemmed from *her exposure to the "dominant culture" through her love of reading* (reaction paper). Experiences relating to the stereotypical and discriminating behaviors of others were similar for the five women. All participants reported experiences of being discriminated against because of their ethnicity. However, the majority felt that this behavior was due more to an ignorance of other cultures rather than to malice. According to Iwalani *many of the stereotypes that teachers have of their students, in my opinion, are not held to intentionally hurt people. It is more the fact that they are not educated enough to know the effects of what stereotypes can do to an individual* (personal narrative). Apart from their experiences with the admission test, the university system was not seen as hostile by the women, although Pua'ala and Bernice talked about the mystery of getting information about various programs. Moana, who was the most positive about her experiences on the University of Hawai'i campus, said she was given adequate support by her Hawaiian Studies counselor who gave her *"info" about what we needed and when we needed it* (personal narrative).

When asked about their success in mastering the mainstream culture of the education system especially the English language of instruction, the women reported varying experiences. Iwalani, Sheila, and Pua'ala felt they had difficulty mastering standard English. This was attributed to a lack of reading materials in the home and to a lack of preparation in high school English classes. Moana, who stated that she had no problem mastering the mainstream culture, provided an explanation for those whose experiences are problematic--*the main problem for Hawaiians is the lack of English speakers in the home. The language they grow up speaking, therefore, is pidgin. Once you get into academics, the problems begin. If you can't "codeswitch" then you are perceived as someone who is less able in terms of reading and writing. I never really had this problem. My mother and grandfather both speak proper English* (reaction paper). Iwalani, Sheila, Bernice, and Pua'ala also noted that a lack of role models (across all levels of the education system) negatively impacted their progress. Bernice noted that *...As far as teachers throughout my education, I didn't have much of any positive role models. There weren't many Hawaiian women in administrative positions. I remember many Japanese or Caucasians in administrative positions, but no Hawaiians* (reaction paper). Pua'ala felt that *because of the lack of role models (Hawaiian teachers) that I could identify with, teaching was not an occupation that I considered. Most of my teachers were Asian--so it seemed to be an Asian profession* (life

history interview). Moana described a different experience. She said she *always had a role model...., my grandfather. Because of him, it never occurred to me that I couldn't do something, anything that I put my mind to* (reaction paper).

There are two distinct ways to understand the implications of this study. Bernice, Iwalani, Pua'ala, and Sheila shared many similar experiences. This information adds to the research on the challenges often faced by Hawaiian women as they pursue their studies in higher education. All four reported several factors that they felt hindered their progress. These included their low self-expectations of academic success, their poor preparation for academic study, their discriminatory treatment by some teachers, and their problems passing the admission test requirement for entrance into their preservice teacher education program. Bernice, Pua'ala, and Sheila also noted that scarce family finances added an additional hardship.

Moana's more positive experiences, and associated accomplishments, also add to the research on Hawaiian women in education. The youngest and only one to hold a baccalaureate degree, Moana described the strong grounding she received attending a private high school and the support she received from her grandfather. As a result, she talked positively of her expectations to succeed academically and described fewer incidences of discriminatory treatment by teachers. Moana was the only one of the five who did not have problems passing the admission test requirement for entrance into her preservice teacher education program.

Concluding Comments

The information described as impacting the progress of Hawaiian women in higher education, is assisting the researchers' attempts to address the shortage of educators of Hawaiian ethnicity across all levels of the Hawai'i education system. By determining how best to recruit Hawaiians, especially Hawaiian women, to the teaching profession; how to provide culturally responsive teacher education programs that cater to the specific and unique needs of all individuals, especially Hawaiians and other underrepresented ethnicities; how to support new teachers once they enter their own classrooms; and how to recruit them to and support them in masterate and doctoral programs in education and related fields, the researchers hope to make significant contributions to the mission of ensuring equal education opportunities for all, particularly Hawaiian women.

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